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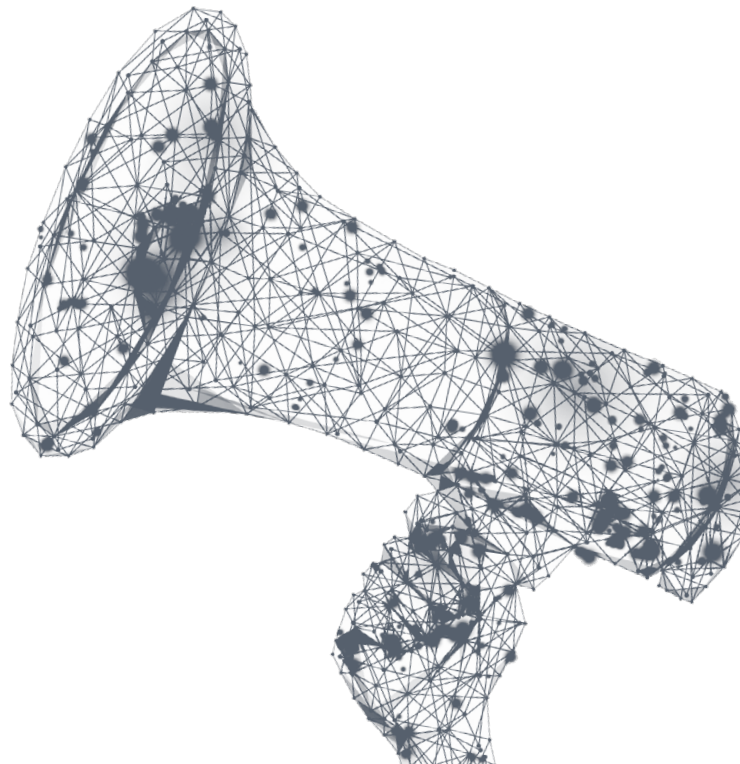
# B2B Marketers Speak: Success Depends on Mastering the Business Practice of Content Management

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A DCG RESEARCH REPORT

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# Executive Summary

B2B marketers don't need to be convinced that content is the engine that fuels their businesses. As just one example, consider how the B2B buyer's journey has evolved in the digital era. Today, 71% of B2B buyers prefer to conduct research on their own, with a sales representative available via phone or chat only when needed. Just 12% of buyers want to meet with a sales rep in person.<sup>1</sup> Given a sales cycle that's largely controlled by the prospective buyer, the right content at the right time through the right channel is the difference between a new customer and a lost sale. B2B marketers who are responsible for such content live at this moment-of-truth juncture. They must respond to the constant pressure by engaging audiences continuously with fresh, high-quality content.

Harnessing the power of content in the digital era, however, is no easy feat. The need to fill and refill the content pipeline, to track and measure, and to deliver effectively is inexorable. Content is created, stored, and managed in multiple formats and systems, including web content, product information, customer information, and digital assets. Marketers need to be able to access that content quickly and easily, and tailor it in dynamic, personalized ways. Content delivery in multiple languages through multiple channels adds to the complexity.

The good news is that marketers have proven systems and tools that enable them to meet these challenges. These are the very problems that content management technologies, practices, and capabilities are meant to address. Over the last decade, the needs of marketing organizations have largely driven the evolution of web content management systems into contemporary digital marketing platforms. While the technology solutions have long been available, how well are B2B marketers leveraging them to drive and support their strategies and programs? How are B2B marketers approaching the alignment of customer demands with content management capabilities, practices, and systems? How are they prioritizing investment in content creation and management skills for their teams? Most importantly, how prepared are marketers to successfully harness content for effective marketing in the future?

In fall 2017, Digital Clarity Group (DCG) set out to answer these and other questions related to B2B marketers' attitudes and behaviors towards content management technologies and practices. For the first annual DCG Voice of the Marketer research program, sponsored by censhare, we fielded online surveys from marketing professionals with responsibility for content management at their companies. Two hundred respondents from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, at companies with US \$250 million or more in annual revenue, completed the survey. The inquiry was organized around three key themes:

- Where does marketing content reside in organizations?
- Who is responsible for creating and managing that content?
- What are the challenges marketers face in deploying content effectively to meet business goals?

This DCG report is the first in a series on the 2017 DCG Voice of the Marketer research. It focuses on core attitudes about the role that content management plays in effective B2B marketing, describes the current alignment between attitudes and actual practices, and concludes with recommended actions that marketers can take towards mastering the business practice of content management.



# Findings in This Report

- 1 B2B marketers place higher importance on strategic skills for managing content as a business practice than on tactical skills for getting the work done.
- 2 B2B marketers have confidence in their current skill levels, but they also recognize challenges with managing content for more effective marketing.
- 3 Gaps in technology, process management, budget deficiencies, and skills are the primary barriers.
- 4 Technology pain points arise from lack of sufficient solutions, not from lack of integration among multiple content repositories.
- 5 Marketing leaders can better leverage their content management practices by prioritizing development of high-value skills, assessing alignment of technologies with business objectives on a regular basis, and experimenting with new models for training and staffing content professionals.

# Key Insight: Content Management Is Strategic, Not Tactical

We asked B2B marketers about the top three skills that a marketing organization needs to effectively manage content. The results are shown in Figure 1.

More than half of the survey respondents rank skills associated with managing content as a business practice more highly than skills associated with executing marketing and content tactics:

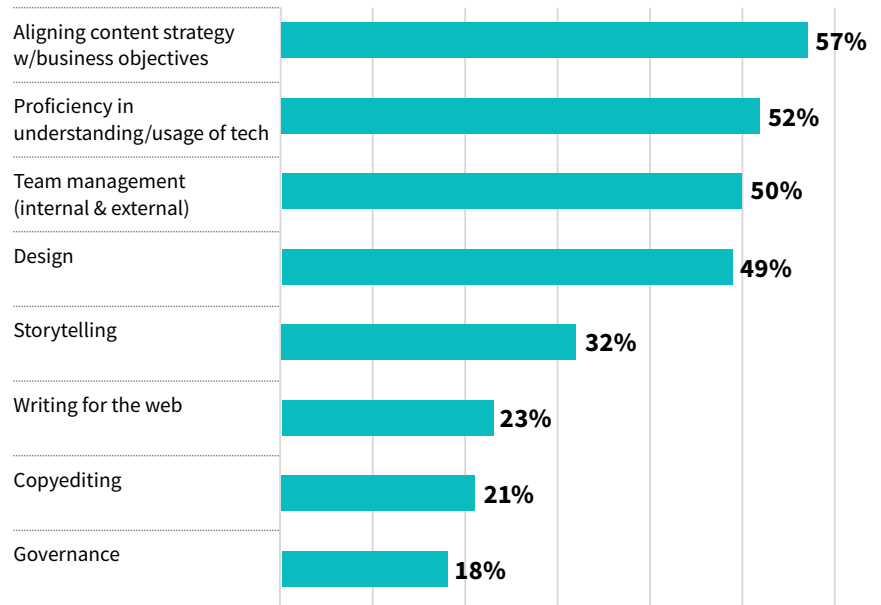
- Aligning content strategy with business objectives (57%),
- Proficiency in understanding/using technology (52%), and
- Managing internal and external teams (50%).

These top three responses are organizational skills that accrue value to the broader business over time. B2B marketers prioritize them over skills that support the day-to-day operations of the marketing team. The strategic aspects of content management – achieving business objectives, building technical proficiency, and managing people – are more relevant to ensuring marketing success than the tactical aspects, such as storytelling (32%), writing for the web (23%), and copyediting (21%). At 49%, design straddles the spot between strategic and tactical skills.

If this is the prevailing attitude on the part of B2B marketers, how well do their current behaviors line up? Are content management practices delivering as they should, or are there gaps that could be addressed for more effective marketing performance?

Figure 1  
**Top Three Skills to Effectively Manage Content for Marketing**

“What do you believe are the top three skills that a marketing organization needs to effectively manage content for marketing?”



n=200

*B2B marketers say the business aspects of content management are more important for their effectiveness than tactical content skills.*

# We're Doing Well, But ...

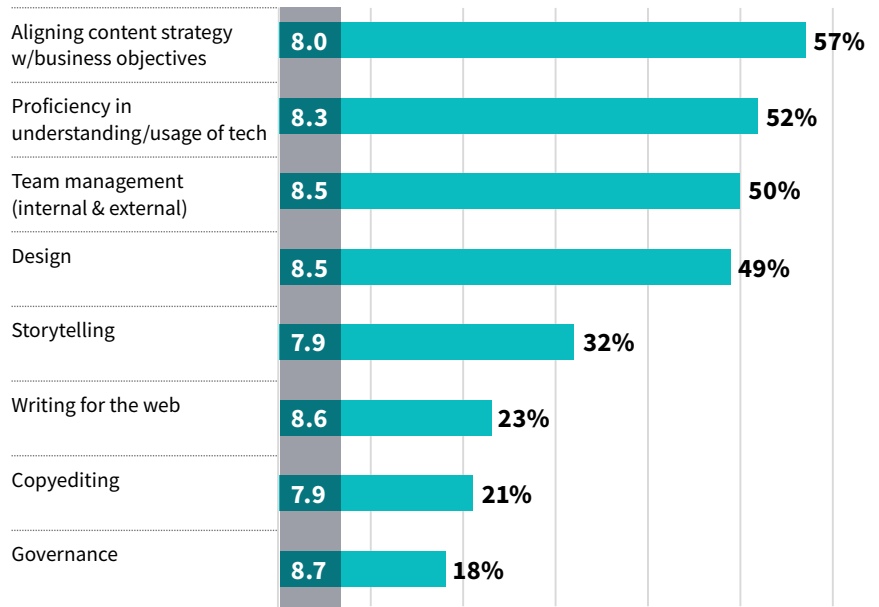
To assess attitudes towards the current state of practice, DCG asked respondents to rate their competency in the top three skills they identified as important for effectively managing content for marketing. Figure 2 shows that they give themselves high marks on the necessary skills. The number on each horizontal bar represents the average score, on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the highest, that marketers assign to their organization. For example, marketers who identified alignment of content strategy with business objectives as an important skill assessed their competency as 8 out of 10.

In addition to these relatively high marks on competencies, the majority of marketers surveyed say that the systems in which marketing content is stored are fairly well integrated. We first asked about the types of systems that house digital content for marketing (see Figure 3). Then we asked how well those systems are integrated. Eighty-nine percent of respondents indicated either that their systems have a single interface to nearly all systems where content is stored (60%) or that system access is through a single interface with a few systems that require separate log-ins (29%).<sup>2</sup>

On these data alone, we might conclude that marketers are feeling comfortable with their level of content management capabilities and competencies. But responses to questions about challenges and barriers paint a more complex picture of content management for B2B marketers.

Figure 2  
**Marketers' Assessment of Competency Levels**

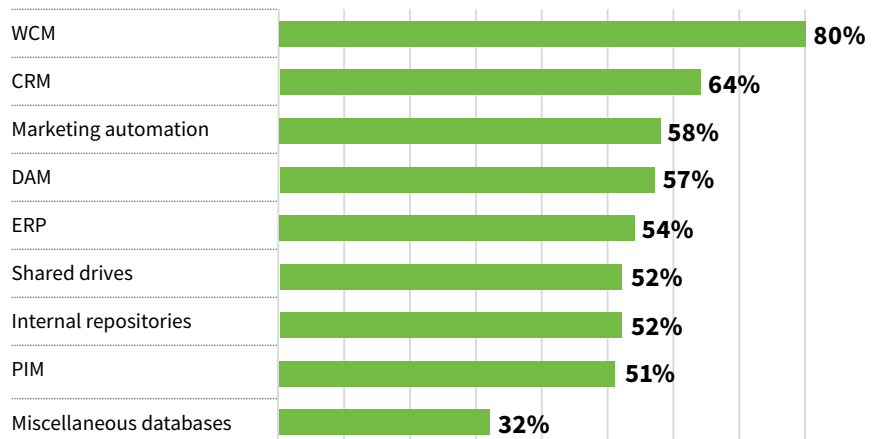
“On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being outstanding, how do you rate your marketing organization’s competency in each of the top three skills you selected?”



n=200

Figure 3  
**Repositories for Marketing Content**

“In which types of systems does digital content reside at your company?”



n=200

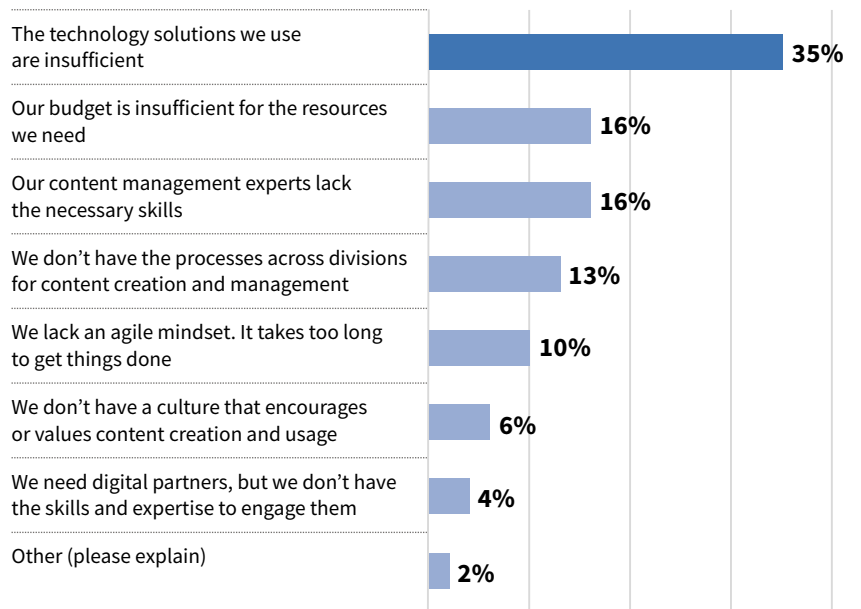
## Content technology, people, and process barriers hinder optimized B2B marketing

We asked marketers to identify the single most significant barrier to their company's ability to leverage content for effective marketing. As shown in Figure 4, they point to challenges with technology, people, and process as three of the top four barriers. Specifically, they cite insufficient technology (35%), content professionals lacking the necessary skills (16%), and a lack of cross-divisional processes for content creation and management (13%).

To tease out challenges, we asked respondents which one of three statements best describes the degree of effort required to execute marketing initiatives involving content at their companies. Figure 5 indicates that more than half of marketers surveyed say that content provisioning and distribution is their top challenge.

Figure 4  
**Most Significant Barrier to Company's Ability to Leverage Content for Effective Marketing**

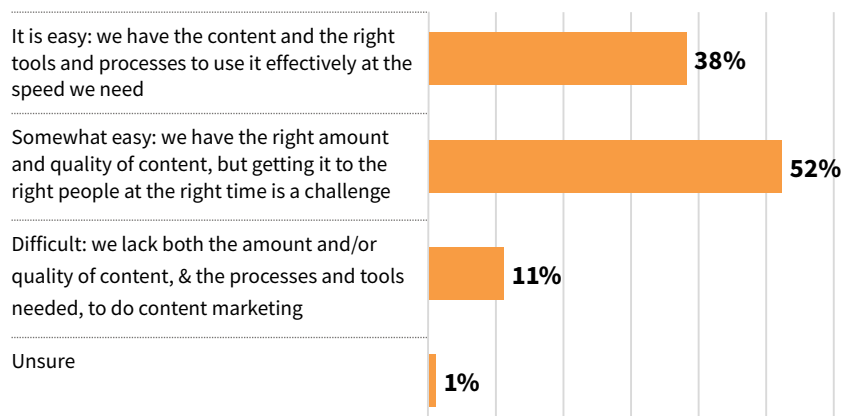
“What is the MOST significant barrier to your company's ability to leverage content for effective marketing?”



n=200. Due to rounding, percentages may not total exactly 100.

Figure 5  
**Effort Required to Execute Marketing Initiatives Involving Content**

“Which statement best describes the degree of effort it takes to execute marketing initiatives involving content at your company?”



n=200. Due to rounding, percentages may not total exactly 100.



## What do the contradictions say about the current state of content management for B2B marketing?

The results of DCG's 2017 Voice of the Marketer survey reveal a contradiction in how marketers perceive the state of content management at their organizations. On the one hand, marketers believe that content professionals at their companies have the necessary skills to do their jobs and that their disparate content repositories are fairly well integrated. At the same time, many marketers admit to struggling to get content to the right people at the right time, and they point to insufficient technology, lack of skills, and insufficient cross-functional processes as their top challenges.

What accounts for the contradiction? How can technology proficiency be viewed as important and current competencies rated highly if the technology solutions currently in use are insufficient? How can effective alignment with content strategy occur if the content professionals charged with executing that strategy lack the necessary skills? Based on our consulting work and technology selection engagements with enterprise buyers, we can offer possible explanations.

- Marketers may not always be involved in gathering requirements for new technology selections, and so do not have a say in buying decisions even in cases where they are the primary users of the systems.
- If marketers are not aware of what service agreements are available for the systems they use, they may not have access to experts within their company, or at their technology vendor or systems integrator/digital agency partner, to help them to troubleshoot problems. In the absence of expertise, marketers may fault the technology itself when, in fact, the problems lie in how it was designed or implemented.
- The rapid pace of change within their organization or industry may require that marketers increase the speed and volume of content production. The business may expect the same employees to take on more and more tasks with the same tools, knowledge, and processes, rather than looking for opportunities to automate or outsource lower-value tasks.

*Marketers admit to struggling to get content to the right people at the right time, and they point to insufficient technology, lack of skills, and insufficient cross-functional processes as their top challenges.*

# A Roadmap to More Effective B2B Marketing Narrows the Gaps Between Current and Future Content Management Practices

The results of DCG's 2017 Voice of the Marketer research indicate that B2B marketers have a wealth of content, technology, and people at their disposal, and they understand that they need to align content management with organizational strategy. The survey surfaced opportunities to use those assets more effectively and efficiently. Addressing these challenges and becoming successful at the business practice of content management may at first glance seem a daunting task for the already busy marketer. DCG offers three recommendations for closing the gap between the current state and optimized content management for B2B marketing.

## Prioritize higher-value activities

Marketers largely agree that content strategy must align with business objectives to be effective for marketing, and that technology fluency and team management are also essential. Establishing and managing alignment with business goals requires marketing leaders to demonstrate strong stakeholder management and collaboration, an understanding of key technologies, and team-building expertise.

Marketing leaders therefore need to be ruthlessly efficient regarding where they and their employees focus their energy, time, and budget. For example, should the same amount of time be invested in skills that marketers view as comparatively lower value, such as copyediting and writing for the web? There are ample competent professionals with these skills. Depending on the volume and complexity of content an organization creates,

these skills can be acquired by hiring employees or contractors, or bought as a service from a marketing agency.

In addition to examining ways to focus on higher-value tasks, marketing leaders should also identify and implement content process improvements. As shown in Figure 4, 13% of marketers believe that lack of cross-divisional processes is their biggest challenge, and 10% believe that the lack of an agile mindset is their biggest obstacle to getting things done. Couple that with the finding that over 50% of marketers report trouble getting content to the right people at the right time, and process improvement emerges as an area where even a few changes can lead to big steps forward.

Undertaking process improvement requires establishing collaboration with the leaders of other parts of the organization that touch content: IT manages the paths over which content travels, the director of e-commerce manages online product content, sales directors manage customer records, and legal and compliance directors inform governance. This means that cultivating peer relationships and finding like-minded champions should also be a focus for marketing leaders.

## Regularly assess how content technology aligns with business strategy

The survey data show that many marketers acknowledge the importance of technology skills (see Figure 1) while also indicating that the technology solutions they use are insufficient (see Figure 4). For these companies, regular and frequent assessments of how their technologies line up with business and content needs can provide insight on the best new technology investments.

With the fast pace of change, technology assessments would benefit every organization's regular strategic planning process. In theory, these should be done on a recurring basis, such as yearly, or even more frequently for more rapidly moving industries. In practice, they tend to happen on an ad hoc basis, such as when an existing technology vendor is acquired by another.

This regular technology assessment need not be so extensive as to cover the entire organization's tech stack and all the associated processes and people that touch that stack. Instead, it might cover the systems most commonly used for creating and storing content, including those for web content management, customer relationship management, and marketing automation (as shown in Figure 3).

## Experiment with new training and staffing models for content professionals

B2B marketers believe that their content management experts' lack of skills is the second most significant barrier to their company's ability to leverage content for effective marketing, tied with insufficient budgets (see Figure 4). The study did not explore where or how marketers perceive that those skills fall short. We can, however, draw on insights based on our work as consultants and advisors to companies deploying solutions for experience management.

Most broadly, content professionals are those employees in an organization who are responsible for creating, managing, and distributing content. This content can be either physical – in the form of published marketing collateral, direct mail, or print advertising – or digital, such as websites, social media, email campaigns, or video, audio, or banner advertising. Content professionals typically have a background and training in writing, design, and/or communications.

The proliferation of digital content types and channels has created a need for more specialized content skills and for roles that as recently as a decade ago did not exist. For example, it is no longer enough for a copywriter to be skilled at creating engaging print collateral, press releases, or advertising copy. To be a successful and valued copywriter also requires an understanding of search engine optimization (SEO), effective blog

style and structure, email personalization, and audience-measurement analytics – the latter because that is how a copywriter’s performance will be measured. There are similar challenges for other content-creator types such as video producers, graphic designers, and creative directors. Simply “being creative” is no longer a sufficient competency for content creation roles.

This may be why marketing leaders come up against a common challenge in executing effective content marketing: they or their organization’s decision-makers may not fully appreciate how much the content professional’s role has grown, not only in complexity but also in the value it can add.

How can marketers ensure that the content professionals with whom they work develop the most useful and valuable skills? A first step can be to get them out of their comfort zone of the content group and embed them with lines of business for whom they create content. This will give them first-hand experience with counterparts working on specific business objectives such as sales or customer service. DCG’s Voice of the Marketer survey found that 89% of content professionals tend to be mostly or entirely in the same business unit.<sup>3</sup> While the advantage of content creators all sitting physically or virtually together is that they can easily share best practices about content-specific competencies like storytelling or design, they miss out on gaining a deeper understanding of the audience of customers, prospects, and partners that are the ultimate content consumers.

Firms that are unsure what content management skills they even need to acquire can turn to the scores of marketing agencies that specialize in content creation and digital marketing; these agencies can recommend the most appropriate staff augmentation services to existing marketers and content managers.

# Conclusion: Mastery of Content Management As a Business Practice Can Be Transformative

Marketing as a discipline is in massive flux, driven by ever more digitally savvy and information-powered customers who take to new channels at a lightning pace. These changes demand that marketers experiment with and adopt new customer communications and engagement models. DCG's 2017 Voice of the Marketer research confirms that in this environment, the ability to manage content as a strategic asset for effective marketing has become vital to marketers' success.

Understanding content management as a business practice that requires the most effective and efficient use of technology and human capital is a requirement for marketers to not just survive, but to thrive, in the always-on, digitally enabled world. And while organizations may value content, DCG's research indicates that investing in content management is a vital business practice on a par with the likes of financial management, human resources management, or product management. Marketers, for whom content is an inherent part of their job, seem to recognize that this needs to happen. It is up to leaders and executives across the organization to recognize the opportunity and to make investments that can turn the practice of business marketing into a competitive advantage.

*Understanding content management as a business practice that requires the most effective and efficient use of technology and human capital is a requirement for marketers to not just survive, but to thrive, in the always-on, digitally enabled world.*

# Appendix: Research Methodology

The findings and analysis presented in this report are drawn from DCG's first Voice of the Marketer research program, conducted in fall 2017, with support from censhare.

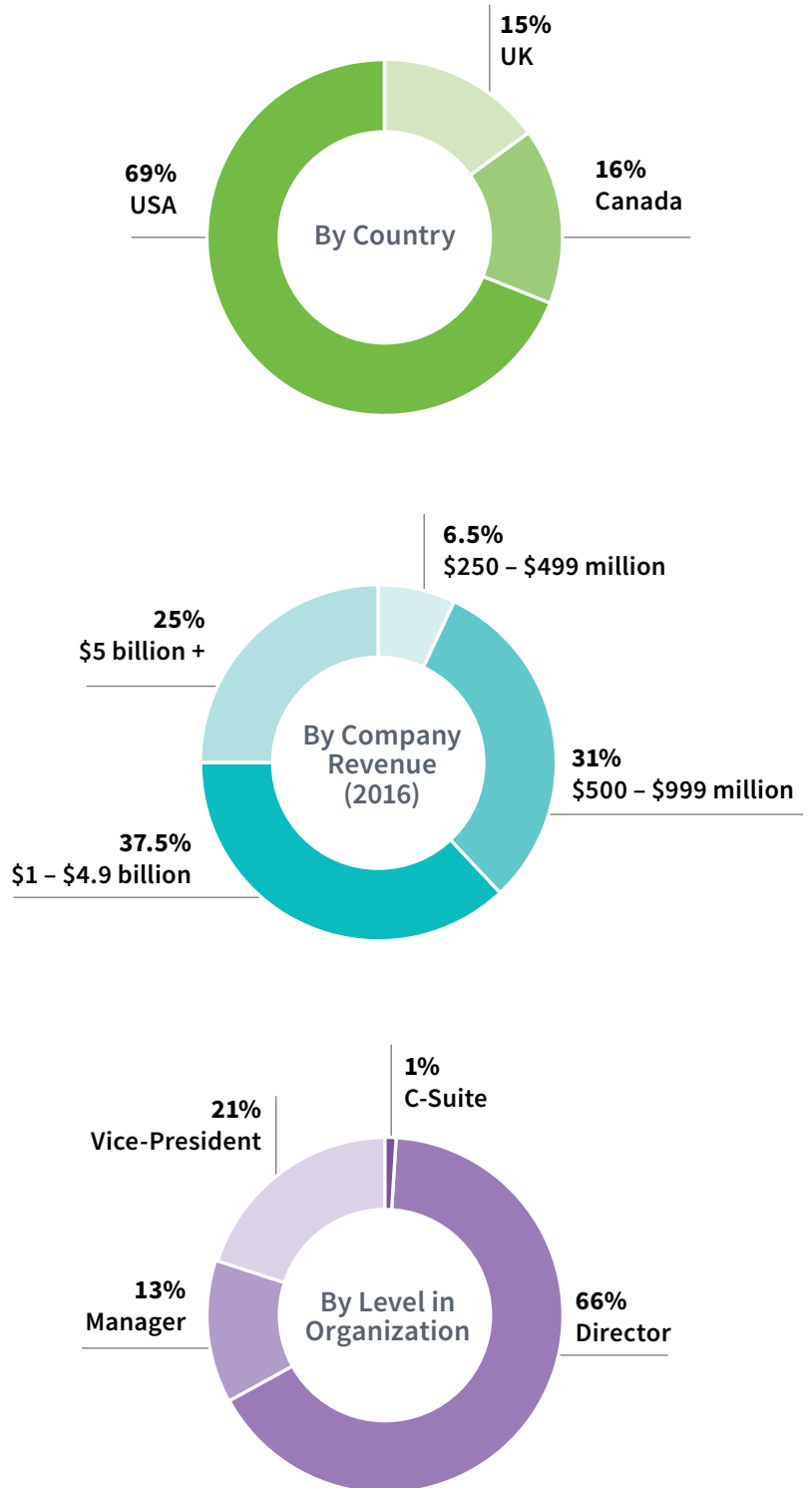
The basis for the research effort was an online survey of marketing professionals in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom with managerial responsibility for content at companies with US \$250 million or more in annual revenue. Two hundred qualified respondents completed the survey. Respondent demographics are illustrated in Figure 6.

Respondent job titles as a percentage of responses included:

- Director of marketing (54%)
- VP, marketing (14%)
- Director, marketing operations (12%)
- Marketing technologist, director of communications, director of digital asset management, and chief marketing officer (4% each)
- Other, including CEO, manager of global events, creative director, and workforce management director (4% total)

DCG's analysis was also informed by experience gathered across more than 50 engagements with Global 2000 organizations, providing consulting and advisory services on the selection of technology vendors and services partners for customer experience management.

Figure 6  
Survey Respondent Demographics



# Endnotes

- 1 “2014 State of B2B Procurement Study: Uncovering the Shifting Landscape in B2B Commerce,” Accenture, [https://www.accenture.com/t20150624T211502\\_w\\_us-en\\_acnmedia/Accenture/Conversion-Assets/DotCom/Documents/Global/PDF/Industries\\_15/Accenture-B2BProcurement-Study.pdf](https://www.accenture.com/t20150624T211502_w_us-en_acnmedia/Accenture/Conversion-Assets/DotCom/Documents/Global/PDF/Industries_15/Accenture-B2BProcurement-Study.pdf)
- 2 DCG’s survey asked “How well are systems containing content integrated at your company?” 200 responses to four statements were distributed as follows. 60% said very well: users have a single interface to access content in nearly all systems where it is stored. 29% said somewhat well: there is a fair degree of integration between systems, but for others, users need separate log-ins. 12% said not very well: a few of the systems are integrated, but users mostly have separate unique log-ins. 1% said not at all well: users have separate log-ins for each system.
- 3 DCG’s survey asked “Where are the people with primary responsibility for content located within the organization?” 200 responses were distributed as follows. 48% said content professionals are all in the same business unit. 41% said content professionals are mostly in the same business unit, but some are in other business units. 11% said content professionals are mostly or entirely distributed across multiple business units.

# About Digital Clarity Group



Digital Clarity Group (DCG) is a research and advisory firm that helps organizations deliver world-class customer experience through partnerships with best-fit technology vendors and digital partners. DCG enables client success by bringing unprecedented transparency to selecting, engaging, and optimizing relationships with digital partners and technology vendors. Its guidance draws on its proprietary data about agency and integrator partner performance, its deep experience with vendor and digital partner selections, and the market expertise of its industry analysts who cover technologies for managing customer experiences. DCG delivers on its mission through its VOCalis customer satisfaction assessment program, its vendor and digital partner selection services, and Partner Finder, a free resource that buyers use to identify qualified digital partners based on key criteria.

Digital Clarity Group serves clients across the ecosystem for customer experience solutions. DCG helps enterprise buyers of services and technologies engage with the optimal set of partners for their digital transformation and customer experience initiatives. DCG helps digital agencies and integrators align their client portfolios with their strongest capabilities and competencies, leading to higher levels of customer satisfaction, repeat business, and performance-based differentiation. DCG helps technology vendors optimize their channel partner programs for successful implementations that deliver sustainable value to customers.

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